

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM  
(NATIONAL HISTORIC

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Rhode Island	
COUNTY: Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME	
COMMON:	First Baptist Meeting House
AND/OR HISTORIC:	First Baptist Meeting House

2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: 75 North Main Street			
CITY OR TOWN: Providence 1st Congressional District			
STATE Rhode Island	CODE 44	COUNTY: Providence	CODE 007

3. CLASSIFICATION			
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY	
OWNER'S NAME: Baptist Church	
STREET AND NUMBER: 75 North Main Street	
CITY OR TOWN: Providence	STATE: Rhode Island
	CODE 44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION	
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Providence City Hall	
STREET AND NUMBER: Dorrance and Washington Streets	
CITY OR TOWN: Providence	STATE: Rhode Island
	CODE 44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS	
TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Building Survey (28 photos, 1774 and 1789 drawings) 4 data pages	
DATE OF SURVEY: 1900, 1937, 1939, 1962 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local	
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Division of Prints and Photographs	
STREET AND NUMBER: Library of Congress/Annex	
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: D.C.
	CODE 11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:  
Rhode IslandCOUNTY:  
ProvidenceFOR NPS USE ONLY  
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DATE

## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Baptist Meeting House was originally eighty feet square, with doors on all four sides, the main entrance being at the west end under the tower. The main body of the church is a two story frame structure with a low pitched roof and gable ends. Wooden quoins visually support the corners adding a vertical emphasis to the horizontal clapboarding and wooden beltcourse at the second story. Two rows of round-headed keystone windows surround the entire building over a high basement with rectangular windows. The graceful spire rises from a projecting pedimented two-story porch or tower with wooden quoins and a modillioned cornice on the gable, like those of the main structure. In the center of the upper story of the pavilion is a Palladian window. The entrance itself is framed by a freestanding pedimented Doric portico. Although the beautifully proportioned and ornamented spire is the major focal point of the building, it lacks unity with the rest of the building in both scale and quality.

This lack of coherence reveals Brown's amateur methods of design. Instead of planning the building as a whole, he gathered parts from various plates in Gibbs' book and adjusted them to accommodate the building. The tower was taken almost line for line from one of the rejected designs for St. Martin's which Gibbs illustrated in his book. A Boston master carpenter, James Summer, was brought to Providence to execute the design in wood, eliminating only the non-architectural ornament.

Originally painted to imitate grained stone, it would have had an even stronger resemblance to the prototype. Gibbs' steeple however, was designed to mount a full Corinthian portico; Brown used instead a small one story portico from another plate, Gibbs' design for Marybone Chapel. The first stage of the spire is square, with quoined corners, relating it to the porch on which it rests. Above this an almost temple like pavilion sits, pedimented on all four sides, with arched openings below, framed by Ionic pilasters. The third and fourth stages are octagonal, diminishing in size, with arched windows and Corinthian pilasters. Ornamental vases or urns at the angles of each stage, decrease proportionately in size, maintaining the upward movement of forms.

On the interior, the Square auditorium is divided into nave and side aisles by a row of four fluted Doric columns on each side which carry an elliptical ceiling and groin-vaulted gallery. A balcony cuts through the columns on both sides. This arrangement is a somewhat simplified version of Gibbs' design for Marybone Chapel, also illustrated in his book. The broad shallow plaster vault over the nave and the groin vaulted side bays are unornamented and create a lofty expansive space, accented by their light, graceful springing from the slender Doric columns. Fluted doric pilasters along the wall correspond to the columns and provide support for the vaults of the side bays.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian☐ 16th Century☒ 18th Century☐ 20th Century☐ 15th Century☐ 17th Century☐ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1774-75

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Aboriginal☐ Education☐ Political☐ Urban Planning☐ Prehistoric☐ Engineering☐ Religion/Phi-☐ Other (Specify)☐ Historic☐ Industry

losophy

☐ Agriculture☐ Invention☐ Science☒ Architecture☐ Landscape☐ Sculpture☐ Art☐ Architecture☐ Social/Human-☐ Commerce☐ Literature

itarian

☐ Communications☐ Military☐ Theater☐ Conservation☐ Music☐ Transportation

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Baptist Meeting House, erected in Providence Rhode Island in 1774-75, is an important example of late Georgian church design in the American colonies. Joseph Brown, a wealthy merchant and professor at Brown University, was in part responsible for the design, based upon an unexecuted variant for St. Martins-in-the-Fields by James Gibbs. The building reflects its New England heritage in its frame and clapboard construction and in its originally square, meeting house plan. Although perhaps not as elegant as Christ Church in Philadelphia (1727-57), with its wealth of Baroque detail executed in brick, or as refined as Kings Chapel in Boston (1761) with its well proportioned portico and fine granite masonry, The First Baptist Meeting House with its well proportioned, elaborate spire retains a strength and dignity which makes it one of the most beautiful eighteenth century churches in America.

HISTORY

In 1638 Roger Williams founded the first Baptist Church in America. For sixty years, services were held in houses of members until the sixth pastor, Pardon Tillinghast, built the first church. In 1774 when it was decided that a new church was needed, a site was chosen and Joseph Brown, amateur architect, and Jonathan Hammond, master carpenter, were sent to Boston to view churches and meetinghouses there. A committee was formed called The Charitable Baptist Society and was granted a Charter of Incorporation giving it the power to receive and hold property. The meeting house was completed in 1775 as an 80 foot square building seating about twelve hundred persons. The design, selected by Joseph Brown, was based upon several plates from James Gibbs' Book of Architecture, 1728, which was owned by Brown. The plan was adapted to confirm to the square, non axial building of the traditional meeting house to disassociate it from Anglican worship. Originally an aisle ran through the middle at right angles to the side aisles with doors opening on all sides. In 1832 the box pews were removed and the present longitudinal ones installed which changed the original orientation of the church. This was further disrupted in 1884 when an addition was made to the east end of the building.

# 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Downing, Antoinette F., Early Homes of Rhode Island, Richmond, Va., 1937.  
 Isham, Norman M., The Meeting House of the First Baptist Church in Providence, Providence R.I., 1925.  
 King, Henry M., "The First Baptist Church, Providence, Rhode Island," Old Time New England, XXXIV, No 3, January, 1944.  
 Marlowe, George F., Churches of Old New England, New York, 1947.  
 Morrison, Hugh, Early American Architecture, New York, 1952.  
 Pierson, William H. Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial -Classical Styles, Garden City, N.Y., 1970.

# 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	UTM	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "	19.299930.4633190	° ' "	° ' "
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "
SE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "
SW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **1.1 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

# 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: <b>Patricia Heintzelman, architectural historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1967.</b>		DATE
ORGANIZATION <b>Historic Sites Survey</b>		<b>1/20/75</b>
STREET AND NUMBER: <b>1100 L. Street, N.W.</b>		
CITY OR TOWN: <b>Washington</b>	STATE <b>D.C.</b>	CODE <b>11</b>

# 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

# NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK)  
 Name Landmark

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Designated: **10/9/60**  
 (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK)

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

**Correllus Reine**  
 NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: **APue Jensen**  
 Director, OAHMP

Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

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7. Description second page

These pilasters are carried around the east wall where they frame the pulpit and sounding board by supporting a keystone elliptical arch molding. This monumental central feature is flanked by large double doors with eared frames topped by broken pediments. Between the pulpit and the sounding board is a Palladian window.

Several other structural changes occurred throughout the nineteenth century. In 1832 the high pulpit and original square pews were removed and the woodwork was painted white. In 1834 the organ, given by Nicholas Brown II, was installed. This was enlarged and rebuilt in 1884 and 1929, but the original case and many of the original pipes have survived. Also in 1884 an addition was made to the east end of the building. Here a new baptistry was installed and a stained glass window inserted in the east wall of the addition. The Waterford glass chandelier is original, given by Hope Brown in 1792.

In 1957, through the interest of John D. Rockefeller Jr., the entire building was renovated and strengthened, the white paint on the interior woodwork was changed to the original sage green, and the high pulpit and sounding board were restored along the lines of the first design. The baptistry added in 1884 was closed off from the main auditorium by means of a reconstructed Palladian window, rebuilt in the position of the original.

BOUNDARY

The First Baptist Meeting House property occupies a full block bounded on the north by the south curb of Thomas Street, on the east by the west curb of Benefit Street, on the south by the north curb of Waterman Street and on the west by the east curb of North Main Street, an area of approximately 1.1 acres.

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LANDMARKS)

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8. Significance second page

With two exceptions (1804 and 1832) Brown University's commencement has been held in the Meetinghouse since 1776. One of these graduates, John D. Rockefeller Jr. funded a complete rehabilitation in 1957-58 and the building remains today both a useful house for an active religious community and a fine example of late Georgian church architecture.